



AUDIO NEWS

CLASSIC DOWNLOAD

Classical music enthusiasts are hailing the unexpected popularity of the free Beethoven symphony downloads, which the BBC recently made available.

The nine symphonies, released in two batches over two weeks in June, were downloaded 1.4 million times. Number six, the Pastoral Symphony, was the most popular, attracting 220,000 downloads. The recordings were made by the BBC Philharmonic in Manchester and conducted by Gianandrea Noseda. Many of the downloaders, said Roger Wright, the controller of Radio 3, were coming to Beethoven for the first time.

Record labels' classical music bosses are reassessing their policy on downloads, having been taken by surprise. It had been thought for a while that the genre was in terminal decline.

Classical music sales through the iTunes Music Store already exceed physical sales. Now insiders are hoping for an upturn in sales to match the last boom when CDs replaced LPs.

HALF A BILLION DOWNLOADS

Apple has presented 10 iPods and a 10,000-song download card to the downloader of the 500,000,000th song from its iTunes Music Store.

Amy Greer of Indiana also won four tickets to see Coldplay on their current tour. For the full details see www.apple.com/itunes/500million.



HOTLIST 2.1 SPEAKERS

TRUST 2.1 Speaker Set SP-3600A

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £33 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.microdirect.co.uk

DETAILS www.trust.com

These classy speakers have a remote that includes a volume control, line input and headphone socket. Sound quality was extremely good in our tests, with solid bass and detailed mid and high frequencies. They aren't massively loud, and the satellite cables are only 1.5 metres long, but they're great value.



SPECIFICATIONS 2.1 speakers, line and aux inputs, 28W RMS power. Part code 14235

REVIEW STEREO PC SPEAKERS

PHILIPS MMS321

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £63 inc VAT

SUPPLIER <http://uk.insight.co.uk>

DETAILS www.philips.co.uk

Most high-end PC speakers are surround-sound devices with multiple channels and a sub-woofer. This kind of setup may pack the necessary punch for gaming, but heavily boosted bass doesn't always do music justice.

Philips' MMS321 speakers aim for a balanced output that's more suitable for music. Like most hi-fi speakers they use multiple drivers to reproduce the full spectrum of sound. This approach enables better fine-tuning of the cross-over between each



driver, so there shouldn't be any frequency at which sound drops off or peaks unnaturally.

Unlike many sub-woofer setups, the MMS321's bass is properly integrated into the sound, which is well defined and even. They reproduced a range of music well, although high strings in our classical piece sounded a bit artificial.

The right speaker's rotating volume control is livened up by a glowing blue halo. It's hard to grip, though, and didn't go as loud as we'd have liked.

These are good speakers for anyone who doesn't need a surround-sound setup.

Simon Handby

✓ Good, balanced sound

✗ Too quiet; odd volume control

SPECIFICATIONS Stereo sound, 80W RMS, one stereo input. Part code MMS321

REVIEW IPOD SPEAKER DOCK

BOSE SoundDock

RATING ★★

PRICE £250 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.apple-shop.co.uk

DETAILS www.bose.co.uk

Bose's SoundDock is small but satisfyingly heavy. It has an interface for docking an iPod or iPod mini, but no regular line in, so other devices aren't supported. The dock interface recharges the player's battery and serves as a line-level audio connection.

You can use the iPod's controls or Bose's infrared remote. This lets you skip and search tracks but only within the current album or song list. The dock's speakers can't be detached to improve the



stereo separation, but they sound excellent. There's plenty of clear, powerful bass and all frequencies are lively and detailed.

The SoundDock is loud enough for a bedroom but not for serious hi-fi use. We wondered if bass vibrations would upset a docked player, but both the iPod and iPod mini coped fine. Apple is selling

the SoundDock with 30 free iTunes downloads, but the high price takes the shine off a great product.

Simon Handby

✓ Great sound; good integration with iPod

✗ Far too expensive

SPECIFICATIONS Stereo sound, iPod dock input only

HOTLIST SOUND CARD

CREATIVE Audigy 2 ZS

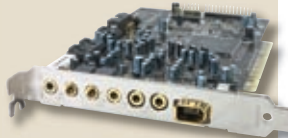
RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £53 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.microdirect.co.uk

DETAILS <http://uk.europe.creative.com>

The inputs and outputs on Creative's Audigy 2 ZS are capable of 24-bit, 96kHz recording and playback for increased clarity. Specialist sound cards have better signal-to-noise performance, but the Audigy's unsurpassed games effects, excellent games bundle and exhaustive DVD-Video and DVD-Audio support make it a great buy for avid gamers or music enthusiasts.



SPECIFICATIONS Line, mic and optical S/PDIF inputs, four line (7.1) outputs, FireWire, PCI interface. Part code 70SB035000005



HOTLIST SURROUND SPEAKER SET

LOGITECH Z-5500

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £211 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.microdirect.co.uk

DETAILS www.logitech.co.uk

Logitech's 5.1 Z-5500 speakers have what it takes to satisfy most people's surround-sound needs. They're powerful enough to shake the house with 505W RMS, and they deliver rich bass thanks to the large sub-woofer.

The speakers are THX-certified and come with a DTS and Dolby Digital decoder, so you can plug in a DVD player as well as a PC.



SPECIFICATIONS 5.1 surround sound, 505W RMS, optical and coaxial digital inputs, three stereo inputs, Dolby Digital and DTS decoder Part code 970115-0120

REVIEW TRAVEL SPEAKERS**PODGEAR
Shuffle Station**

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £30 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.savastore.comDETAILS www.podgear.net

This set of small powered speakers is designed for the iPod shuffle, but with a 3.5mm stereo cable you could use it with any player. It's powered by four AAA batteries or a supplied adaptor that provides enough juice to recharge the shuffle using its USB port. PodGear says it can charge the shuffle during playback, but we found that this produced noise. We also tried to connect a full-size player, which appeared to charge successfully.

The sound is about as good as we'd expect from a pair of above-average notebook speakers. There's little bass, but everything else sounds fair and the volume goes surprisingly high. The Shuffle Station won't earn you an ASBO, but it's great if you're travelling light.

Simon Handby

**REVIEW EXTERNAL IPOD BATTERIES****NYKO
iBoost and iBoost mini**

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £50 each inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.pinpointce.co.uk,

01606 558428

DETAILS www.nyko.com

The iPod and iPod mini in this month's MP3 players *Labs* test (see page 173) have decent batteries, but older models weren't so impressive. These external lithium-ion battery packs are made-to-measure for each player. In our tests, the iBoost mini doubled the battery life of a 4GB iPod mini from six hours and 11 minutes to over 12 hours.

The full-size iBoost proved even more effective. With a battery life of five hours and 39 minutes, our third-generation iPod wouldn't last a flight to New York. With the iBoost fitted it played for over 16 hours, an amazing improvement that would almost see you to Australia. These are great products, but they're not cheap.

Simon Handby

**REVIEW EARPHONES****SENNHEISER
MX 500**

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £15 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.unbeatable.co.ukDETAILS www.sennheiser.co.uk

If your MP3 player's standard earphones aren't up to scratch, these Sennheisers are a cost-effective upgrade. The 'black' ones we tested were a natty metallic blue, but they also come in white. A sliding volume control is moulded into their one-metre cable, which should be long enough to reach a player safely hidden in a pocket or backpack.

Although the packaging proclaims super bass, the MX 500s lack the strong low-end output of other Sennheiser earphones such as the MX 400s. Their sound is wonderfully detailed, however, and their flat response is particularly well suited to classical and acoustic recordings. These earphones are good value, particularly as they come with a hard case.

Simon Handby

**REVIEW HEADPHONES****SENNHEISER
PX 100**

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £27 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.unbeatable.co.ukDETAILS www.sennheiser.co.uk

These lightweight pad headphones are an ideal upgrade to the bud earphones supplied with most MP3 players. They fold up neatly into a supplied hard case and are available in either black or white. They're very similar to the PX 200s we reviewed in *What's New, Shopper* September 2005, but the back of each driver is open rather than closed.

Plenty of music leaks through their open backs, so they're quite likely to elicit frowns of disapproval on public transport. They don't shut out external noise well, either, but music sounds balanced and detailed with plenty of warm bass. Commuters will prefer the PX 200s, but these comfortable headphones are a good choice elsewhere.

Simon Handby

**REVIEW EARPHONES****ARTWIZZ
HangPhones and iSee mini**

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £30 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.artwizz.comDETAILS www.essentialipod.co.uk

These earphones with integrated neck strap are available on their own for £15, or bundled with the clear iPod mini case reviewed here. They sound reasonable, producing more bass than the PowerPhones we reviewed in *What's New, Shopper* September 2005, but you can't hang an iPod mini from them without the rigid iSee mini case.

The case fits snugly around the diminutive MP3 player, protecting it from knocks and scratches while allowing access to its circular control wheel. The HangPhones attach to an eyelet on the iSee mini, and the entire arrangement seems unlikely to let you down. The player's weight could be uncomfortable after a while, though. Buying both together saves you £5, but we'd choose better headphones.

Simon Handby

**REVIEW TRAVEL SPEAKERS****CREATIVE
TravelSound**

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £56 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.savastore.comDETAILS <http://uk.europe.creative.com>

This extremely compact pair of speakers runs on four AAA batteries, yet it sounds surprisingly powerful. Four buttons manage volume, power and a reasonably effective 'wide stereo' feature. The speakers themselves are mounted in a rotating bar that pivots inwards. This prevents them being damaged in transit, while a supplied soft pouch protects the outside of the case from scratches.

You can connect an MP3 player or other audio source through a line-in socket at the rear. There's also a connector for an external AC power supply, but none is included in the box. This seems a bit miserly given the TravelSound's considerable price, and reduces its appeal.

Simon Handby

